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ABSTRACT

There are fewer American Indians in higher education than most other minority groups. Among the few who are enrolled, there is a large percentage of dropouts. It has been extremely difficult to recruit, select, and keep Indian students, even at the graduate level. Several recommendations for obtaining more active Indian participation in higher education and in special programs such as administrator training fellowship programs can be suggested. A coordinated communication system could be established to inform students about available programs. In this system, a person could be designated to be responsible for selecting and recruiting Indian students. Colleges enrolling these students could have an Indian coordinator or counselor aware of all Indian students in their college who could help them from the very beginning. These counselors could coordinate their programs with those of local high schools. One of the major goals of this system could be to inform these students about financial aids and special programs. The curriculum should also be developed to help these students adjust to college life. Thus this system could aid in getting American Indians into higher education. (NQ)

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A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM FOR THE AMERICAN INDIAN IN HIGHER EDUCATION *

The ratio of American Indians in higher education is far lower in terms of their population numbers than most other minority groups in this nation. Even with the few who are enrolled in higher education institutions, much larger percentages than in the mainstream population are dropping out. Institutions of higher education are completely foreign to many of our Indian young people. The territory is hostile, and many times the Indian youth eliminates himself from the program and returns home.

For the past three years, the Department of Educational Administration at New Mexico State University has conducted a fellowship program for the training of persons to work as administrators in schools where there are large numbers of American Indians and Mexican Americans. Attempts have been made to recruit a majority of the program participants from the ranks of the American Indian and the Mexican American. However, during the first two years of the program, only one American Indian completed the training course. Others were chosen but failed to show up. The third year of the program is just beginning, and one quarter-blood and two full-blood American Indians have been chosen to participate.

It has been an extremely difficult situation to recruit, select, and keep Indian students, even at the graduate level, in such a program. Additionally, Indian students are much less willing to come for "normal" fellowships than either the Mexican American or the Anglo. Many of them indicate they need more than is allowed to meet their necessary expenses.

Also at New Mexcco State University is the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, which is responsible for abstracting, indexing, and submitting

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materials related to Indian education for inclusion in the ERIC system. Attempts have been made to have graduate students that are American Indians working at the Clearinghouse. Here again, only one Indian student has worked at the Clearinghouse, and there has been difficulty in interesting others in filling graduate positions at the Clearinghouse while completing graduate programs in education.

Many of the suggestions in this paper will be centered on the problems of obtaining more active Indian participation in higher education and in special programs such as administrator training fellowship programs.

Selection and Recruitment of Indian Students

With the shortage of Indians in higher education, numerous programs around the nation are attempting to recruit American Indian students. In the past, this has been as confusing as it has been helpful to the Indian students. Many of the Indian students have led quite sheltered lives on the reservations or in boarding schools and thus have little understanding of the types or benefits of programs which are available.

A coordinated communication system should be established to enable Indian students to know of the programs available for them in higher education. Those organizations concerned--such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the tribal councils, universities, and colleges--should each designate a person to be responsible in the selection and recruitment of Indian students for higher education. If at all possible, the person with this responsibility should be an Indian or a person with knowledge of the Indian cultures. Those universities and colleges with special programs for Indians could then, through the communication system, contact agencies and tribes which could help in identifying and selecting the persons for the programs. Such an open communication system would better enable the Indian student not only to know of programs available but also to make a better choice.

Many times, speed is essential in such a system as this. Government programs funded in the spring may require participation by the students during the following summer or fall.

The Indians themselves could have potential students identified for different types of programs when these become available. As an example of this, there may be numbers of Indian teachers desiring to become school administrators. These persons could be identified by the tribal educational leaders and, when programs become available, the stage would be set for Indians to take advantage of them. The Indian people could also use this potential-student" information as input for determining for themselves what types of programs should be available for Indian use.

Another problem in this area is the reluctance of Indian applicants to fill out applications completely. In our experience, a number of Indian applicants have merely sent in a letter or a portion of the application. When contacted concerning either material or transcripts which should have been forwarded with the application, the applicants quite often said, "Well, we are waiting to see whether we are selected before we go to the trouble of filling out a complete application or have transcripts made available." This immediately puts Indian students at a disadvantage since other applicants do complete applications and have transcripts and other materials readily available. Thus, coordinators with the Indian tribes should encourage and help Indian applicants to fill out applications for educational programs properly and to submit those applications on time.

Guidance and Counseling

As mentioned earlier, there is a very high incidence of dropouts among the Indian college students. Many times when coming to a foreign campus, they feel completely

alone and leave within a few days, weeks, or months. They have little contact with the faculty or administration and feel that they are completely on their own. It is thus recommended that each college enrolling Indian students have an Indian coordinator or counselor on campus to become aware of all Indian students who enroll in the college and help them from the very beginning. The coordinator's office should be in a location which is readily available to Indian students and where they can feel free to visit.

Some universities and colleges have a large enough enrollment of Indian students that the coordinator could be a full-time person. Other institutions may have an advanced graduate student to serve as a part-time counselor for the Indian students.

The coordinator should also have travel funds available so that he can visit high schools in his area serving large numbers of Indian students. Thus, the coordinator can explain not only the program at his own college or university but also the programs at other institutions. This would strengthen the guidance programs in the local high schools.

In a 1969 study by Harkins and Wood*, it was found that one-half of the Indian students who wanted to go to college did not or could not answer the question, "What kind of college would you like to go to best?" This was mainly because Indian students did not know what kinds of colleges were available. When asked what they wanted to do after college, more than one-third of the students still did not know. When those Indian students who said they wanted to go to college were asked what specific occupation they would like, only 15.7 percent mentioned an

* Harkins, Arthur M., and Richard G. Woods, Education-related Preferences and Characteristics of College-aspiring Urban Indian Teenagers: A Preliminary Report. Minneapolis: Minnesota University, Training Center for Community Programs, 1969 (ED 030 514).

occupation which actually required a college education. This study indicated a complete lack of guidance programs in the schools which these Indians attended.

Persons responsible for guidance and counseling of Indian students in higher education should coordinate their programs with those of the local high schools in order that Indian students are better informed of opportunities available to them.

Financial Aids

Here again, a coordinated information system is needed. This could very well be the same communication system mentioned earlier under Selection and Recruitment of Indian Students.

Each year, many scholarships for Indian students are not used. This is mainly due to the fact that the students themselves or the persons responsible for working with the students are not aware of the financial aids and scholarships available for Indians. The aforementioned information system could have as one of its major goals the informing the Indian students of where the financial aids are available. It is also important that information on such programs be distributed as early as possible.

One of the characteristics of Indian youths, and Indians in general, is that they carefully weigh all decisions, making no snap judgments. If these students are to make decisions concerning further education which will affect them for a lifetime, they need proper time to weigh the information and come up with a decision. This makes it even more important that the information concerning financial assistance be available as soon as possible.

Curriculum Development

Today throughout the nation, we see departments of Black studies, Chicano studies, Native American studies established in the colleges and universities. I have no

quarrel with this and feel that such departments are very important in contributing to understandings of minority cultures and in helping to maintain the cultures. It is also quite important for the Anglo as well as the minority groups to become acquainted with such studies departments and to take an active part in these programs. I am concerned, though, with those persons who advocate only the types of curriculums wherein minority groups learn solely about themselves. This tends to isolate them further and create additional problems.

For American Indian youths, there is a need for special programs--especially at the undergraduate level. Brigham Young University is an example of an institution which brings the Indian students to its campus with a special program of very small classes and instructors who understand Indians. Within a year or two of work in this type of class, Indian young people are able to move to a regular academic program.

It should be noted that Brigham Young University has one of the lowest Indian drop-out rates in the nation--the primary reason being the program with which the Indian students can identify when they come to college. The curriculum is built around their needs, and the instruction is in groups small enough to permit communication with the instructor. After the students have had an opportunity to become acquainted with the large university campus, they become part of the mainstream and, as a result, many finish their degrees.

The coordinator of Indian affairs at each campus should also work closely with the deans and department heads within that institution. He should acquaint them with the special problems of the Indian students and work with them to develop curriculums which would help meet Indian needs. My contention is that Indian students need to be integrated and trained in all occupations and professions, and need the opportunity to enter all curriculums. A large percentage of the Indian students,

as well as many other minority students, go into the sociological types of curriculums, with large numbers also being in education. This should continue to be encouraged; however, we need also to encourage more Indian students to go into the sciences, math, engineering, and other fields where, if properly guided and instructed, they can succeed as well as anyone else.

Special Programs

Indian education has been fragmented in the past, with the Bureau of Indian Affairs responsible for most of the education at the elementary and secondary levels. Now we see public schools taking on more and more of this role with an Indian education desk in the U.S. Office of Education. The USOE Indian education desk has been very poorly staffed and financed during its existence since the majority of the people working in that office are student interns who may have the responsibilities for only between three and nine months before moving back to their colleges or universities. Some of these individuals have had very little experience in working with Indian people.

It is recommended that USOE properly finance the Indian education section and hire additional professional people to work with Indian education. The director of that program should have sufficient help to conduct adequate programs. It is also recommended that, in each of the regional offices of USOE where there are sufficient numbers of Indian students, a coordinator of Indian education be hired. This person would work with the state departments of education, institutions of higher education, and Indian tribes in their particular regions. This person could also act as a catalyst and provide input into the communication system which was advocated earlier.

Special workshops and conferences for all people concerned with education of the American Indians should be held--especially for those people in higher education.

All universities and colleges which participate in scholarship programs for Indians should be required to have the deans, department heads, and others who work with the Indian students in attendance at these seminars and workshops.

It would also be helpful to have national conferences on financial aids for the Indian students. This would facilitate getting the information to those who are looking for aid in going to college.

In conclusion, the plight of the Indian in higher education is bleak. Unless some drastic changes take place, there will be very little improvement. One of the real needs is for a coordinated information system concerning programs in higher education for the American Indian. Coupled with this, there is a need for people to be trained specifically to work with the American Indian. As soon as possible, these people, should come from the ranks of the Indians themselves.

*This is a paper presented at the University of California, Los Angeles American Indian Culture Center 1971 EPDA Short Term Summer Institute, "A Training Program for College Personnel in Recruitment, Counseling, Financial Aid, and Development of Curriculum for American Indian Students", held at Many Farms, Arizona, July 1971.